

Colloquium Brief: American Society and Its Profession of Arms

May 2, 2011 | [Dr. Leonard Wong](#)

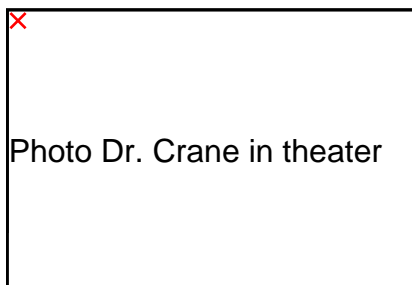
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Conference Key Insights

- *Whether it is the military-industrial complex, veterans resuming civilian lives, ROTC in colleges, or early childhood education, American society has always been, and continues to be deeply intertwined with the military profession.*
- *In many aspects concerning U.S. society and its military profession, panelists often agreed on the essence of issues (e.g., societal demographic and political representation in the armed forces is important, there is a role for the military in humanitarian and reconstruction activities, or soldiers should exercise their religion in the military), but disagreed on the appropriate extent and subsequent implications.*
- *Although many facets of the issues involved with the U.S. armed forces and the society it serves have been examined in past research, the changing world situation and the evolution of the all-volunteer military continues to provide many new and unexplored avenues of scientific inquiry.*

American Society and Its Profession of Arms was the theme of the 22nd annual U.S. Army War College Strategy Conference held April 5–7, 2011. The topic was particularly relevant as the U.S. Army is in the midst of a year-long review of the military profession. The 3-day event brought together leaders from the military, academia, government, media, and general public to discuss topics such as the role of the military, reintegrating veterans back into society, the role of faith in the military, and the impact of deployments on military families. [View the conference website for detailed info on the Annual Strategy Conference.](#)

Conference Electives



The conference began with three preconference electives. Conference attendees traveled to the BAE Systems plant in nearby York, PA, where, in addition to touring the U.S. Army Bradley Fighting Vehicle assembly line, discussions were held exploring the interface between the defense industry, the military,

Photo Dr. Crane in theater

and American society. Another group of participants visited the Letterkenny Army Depot in Chambersburg, PA, to observe missile maintenance and to discuss with depot and community leaders the symbiotic relationship between the depot and the local economy. Finally, another group of conference participants watched and discussed the film, *The Best Years of Our Lives*, a 1946 winner of seven Academy Awards—to include Best Picture. Dr. Conrad Crane moderated the energetic discussion about three WWII veterans who return to society to discover that they and their families have been irreparably changed. The similarities and differences with the movie and the experiences of Vietnam era and today's veterans were intriguing.

Opening Keynote Address: Greg Mortenson

The actual conference began with keynote speaker Mr. Greg Mortenson, co-author of the #1 New York Times best-seller, *Three Cups of Tea*, and author of the new bestseller, *Stones into Schools*. Mortenson spoke about his experience in Pakistan and Afghanistan as he built schools to raise literacy rates for girls. "I think that the American public sometimes places too much pressure on the military. The solution to Afghanistan is much broader," Mortenson commented. "The solution is in sight, we can't throw in the towel now. We have made a commitment and a promise. We can make it to the end." After his remarks, children from a local middle school presented him with a jar of pennies representing the money they raised for his "Pennies for Peace" program that works towards investing in education in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

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America's Society and its Military Profession



▣ The keynote address was followed by the first panel moderated by Dr. Conrad Crane and consisting of Drs. Brian Linn, Richard Hooker, and Peter Feaver. After reviewing the historical aspects of the relationship between the military and the society it serves, Panel I discussed perspectives including the magnitude of the impact of decreasing military experience in elected officials, the political leanings (or lack thereof) of military members, and the extent of familiarity between American society and its military.

Conversation with Michael Gordon, *New York Times* Journalist

After the first panel, conference participants moved to the luncheon, where they listened in on a conversation between two journalists—Mr. Lawrence Kaplan of *The New Republic* and Mr. Michael Gordon of *The New York Times*. The two veteran war correspondents discussed the relationship between the military and the media to include expectations each institution should have of the other. Additionally, the impact of the media on the military's relationship with society emerged as a topic for further analysis.

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Faith in the U.S. Military

▣ The role of faith in the U.S. military was discussed in Panel II moderated by Colonel Dave Reese. Panelists Colonel Ken Bush and Dr. Michael Snape examined the changing and complex role of the chaplaincy in both the American and British militaries. Mr. Mikey Weinstein and Mr. Robert “Skip” Ash debated the issues that emerge when providing for the spiritual needs of soldiers while avoiding the establishment of religion by the government, the prohibition of the free exercise of religion within the military, or the abridgement of the freedom of speech for service

members. As expected, the resulting discussion was lively, informative, and provocative.

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Military Families and Society

Panel III delved into the issues and resulting actions associated with deployments and military families. Major General Fred Rees and Dr. Wayne Hunt discussed recent developments and support offered to families—especially those in the Reserve Component. Mrs. Laura Kubica brought out key points regarding the changing role and challenges faced by military spouses, with an emphasis on the role of leading Family Readiness Groups. The panelists all emphasized that, while repeated deployments were taking a toll on military families, there were programs and efforts that could help to mitigate the negative effects.

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General Richard E. Hawley (U.S. Air Force, Retired), *Mission Readiness: Military Leaders for Kids*

▣ The conference's evening banquet featured retired Air Force General Richard E. Hawley of Mission Readiness: Military Leaders For Kids, an organization promoting continued American security by calling for smart investments in the next generation of American children. General Hawley focused on the need for increased support for early childhood education programs to raise literacy levels and lower obesity rates in America's youth. Interestingly, keynote speaker Greg Mortenson asserted that increased Afghan child literacy is a key factor in the security of Afghanistan, while banquet speaker General Hawley claimed that increased American early childhood literacy was a vital component of U.S. national security.

Reintegrating Veterans into American Society

Panel IV opened the third day of the conference with a focus on U.S. military veterans and their reintegration to American society. Dr. John Smith moderated the session as Lieutenant Colonel David Lyle, Dr. George Rutherford, and Dr. Joseph Sabia discussed the physical, mental, and economic issues encountered by veterans. By analyzing data on veterans available from a variety of different sources, the panelists presented the most up-to-date picture of the complexities and unexpected consequences of disability diagnoses and policies, physical and mental health disability rates from past conflicts and from the war on terror, and the incidence of mental health problems in veterans who have served in a combat zone. The subsequent discussion with the audience proved especially lively as the many conference participants were intrigued by this relatively nascent avenue of research. ▣

Roles of the Military and Society: Reciprocal Expectations?

Panel V examined reciprocal expectations of the role of both the military and society. The panel was moderated by Prof. Douglas Lovelace and featured Dr. Douglas Stuart, Dr. Diana Putman, and Dr. Nadia Schadlow. The panelists examined the interrelationship between military and political policy leaders as well as exploring the appropriate boundaries of military involvement in humanitarian or reconstruction operations. Despite differences in opinion, the panelists seemed to be in agreement that, while the boundaries of military participation are delineated fairly clearly in peacetime, they become less discernible (and less restrictive) during war.

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Banquet Presentation: Major General Robert Ivany (U.S. Army Retired)

Panel V was followed by luncheon speaker retired U.S. Army Major General Robert Ivany. With previous experience as the Commandant of the U.S. Army War College and insights from his current position as President of St. Thomas University, General Ivany spoke of the relationship between academe and the military. He focused on three key areas in that relationship: 1) the implications of the 9/11 GI bill on college campus veteran representation, 2) potential implications of ROTC accessions trends and demographic shifts on the officer corps, and 3) the concept of American exceptionalism, and its implications relative to the military's engagement with academe.

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Closing Keynote Address: Lieutenant General John E. "Jack" Sterling, Jr., U.S. Army

Lieutenant General John E. "Jack" Sterling, Jr., the Deputy Commanding General, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, delivered the concluding Strategy Conference [keynote address](#). General Sterling returned the focus of the conference back to the overall relationship between American society and its military profession. He noted that society trusts the military to apply lethal force ethically, and he established that as a criterion for its continued willingness to commit society's sons and daughters to the profession. In a review of the profession across the U.S. Army, there have been signals that some in American society are questioning that trust. General Sterling challenged the panelists and audience to continue to explore the role of the military as a profession within American society as the country shifts to a future of many uncertainties and complexities.

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